

STATEMENT BY

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BEFORE

PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SECOND SESSION, 109TH CONGRESS

DECEMBER 06, 2006

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

UNTIL RELEASED BY THE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

Chairman McHugh, Representative Snyder and other distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of America's Army. It is a privilege to be here today to present our system of military awards to you. Our awards system recognizes and reacts to distinguishing acts of valor and bravery for our Soldiers. The commander on the ground is the steward to ensure proper recognition of our brave men and women and we are confident in the commander's decisions and authority in these matters.

The Army is fully committed to the responsibility to properly recognize our Soldiers for their valor, heroism and meritorious service through a fair and consistent decorations and awards policy and process. Awards and decorations are very important to Soldiers. Equally important is our governance of the awards program. For the awards program to be credible to the Soldiers and the American people it must ensure that it recognizes the right individuals for the proper award. It must ensure the integrity of the award is maintained through strict procedures and proper justifications. Finally it must place trust and confidence in commanders to execute the program.

Army awards for valor are steeped in history - each has a long line of distinguished recipients who fought our Nation's wars. Recognizing heroic Soldiers in a manner that reflects the nature and degree of their gallantry and courage is among the Army's most time-honored traditions. When our Soldiers receive recognition by any of these awards, it is truly heartfelt.

The criteria for military awards are set forth in statutes, executive orders and appropriate regulations. Established by law, the criteria for the three highest valor awards have not changed during the Global War on Terror from what they were in the past conflicts. Army regulation and policy establish the standards by which

those awards are processed, approved and presented. This consistency upholds the heritage of the awards and the legacy of the heroes who have earned them.

Army policy allows any Soldier to recommend another Soldier for an award. Our awards program relies on those with first-hand knowledge of a Soldier's heroic or valorous action to recommend the Soldier for the appropriate award. Award recommendations are sent up through the Soldier's chain of command to company, battalion, brigade and division commanders. Division Commanders approve Bronze Star Medals and lesser awards. Commanders at every level of review can recommend approval or upgrade of the award based upon their authority. Commanders with authority to approve awards also have the authority to downgrade or disapprove awards based on their judgment, knowledge, and the criteria established for the award. Command involvement is critical for program success.

The three highest decorations for valor are the Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, and the Silver Star. These awards are processed and approved above the division commander's authority. Meritorious recommendations for either the Medal of Honor or Distinguished Service Cross are reviewed by the senior Army Decorations Board which consists of Army Lieutenant Generals and, for recommendation involving enlisted personnel, the Sergeant Major of the Army. The board reviews each award recommendation strictly on its merits. There are no awards quotas or limits, nor is there a rank requirement for a specific award.

I will now briefly discuss these three significant awards for valor, the criteria and the numbers awarded for each under the current conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Medal of Honor is awarded by the President, in the name of Congress, to a service member who, distinguishes himself or herself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his or her life above and beyond the call of duty while

engaged in action against an enemy of the United States; while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force; or while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party. The deed performed must have been one of personal bravery or self-sacrifice so conspicuous as to clearly distinguish the individual above his or her comrades and must have involved risk of life. Incontestable proof of the performance of the service is required and each recommendation for the award of this decoration will be considered on the standard of extraordinary merit. Again, only the President can award the Medal of Honor.

In Operation Iraqi Freedom, the President awarded one Medal of Honor, to the late Sergeant First Class Paul R. Smith, B Company, 11th Engineer Battalion, 3rd Infantry Division, on April 4th, 2005.

The second highest award bestowed upon a Soldier for valor is the Distinguished Service Cross. The Distinguished Service Cross is awarded to a Soldier who distinguishes himself or herself by extraordinary heroism not justifying the award of a Medal of Honor; while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States; while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing/foreign force; or while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing Armed Force in which the United States is not a belligerent party. The act or acts of heroism must be so notable and have involved risk of life so extraordinary as to set the individual apart from his or her comrades. Distinguished Service Crosses are approved by the Secretary of the Army.

To date, four Soldiers were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for valor in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Finally, the third highest award for combat heroism is the Silver Star. The Silver Star is awarded to a Soldier who is cited for gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force, or while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party. The required gallantry, while of a lesser degree than that required for award of the Distinguished Service Cross, must nevertheless have been performed with marked distinction. Approval authority for the Silver Star is delegated to the Commanders of Multinational Force Iraq, Multinational Corps Iraq and U.S. Army Central Command (ARCENT) so that deserving Soldiers can be quickly recognized with the appropriate decorations for their actions.

To date, these commanders awarded 163 Silver Star awards to Soldiers for valor in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As mentioned earlier and I re-emphasize again, if a commander at any level believes a valorous action warrants an award higher than their approval authority, they may forward the recommendation to the next higher headquarters for consideration.

I am confident that commanders execute the awards program as it is intended. Coupled with these policies and procedures, we continue to recognize deserving Soldiers with awards appropriate to their actions. Our system is fair and equitable and protects the integrity inherent in the whole concept of recognizing courage in combat. Our Soldiers deserve no less.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering your questions.